



International Maritime Organization (IMO)

IMO is the permanent international body established to address maritime safety issues

What is the IMO?

The International Maritime Organization is the United Nations' specialized agency, representing 157 Member States, and two Associate members, responsible for improving maritime safety and preventing pollution from ships on the world's waterways.

With a staff of 300 people IMO is one of the smallest of all United Nations agencies, but it has achieved considerable success in achieving its aim of "safer shipping and cleaner oceans." With the implementation of more stringent safety and procedural standards such as traffic separation schemes, the rate of serious casualties at sea fell appreciably during the 1980s and estimates indicate that oil pollution from ships was cut by around 60% during the same period.

What is the purpose of the IMO?

Although international efforts to improve maritime safety had been undertaken as early as 1914 following the tragic loss of the TITANIC, no permanent international body existed devoted exclusively to maritime matters. The need for such an organization was recognized at a United Nations conference in 1948 with the adoption of the convention establishing the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization (later renamed IMO). The convention entered into force in 1958 and the new organization met for the first time the following year.

The International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) was the most important of all treaties dealing with

What does it do?

IMO has a broad scope of influence. Since its inception, it has adopted 40 conventions and over 700 codes aimed at improving maritime safety. These have been adopted to address the issues arising with the growth of the maritime industry.

Amendments

IMO met and adopted a new SOLAS Convention in 1974. During that conference a new amendment procedure was adopted to correct previous problems in achieving timely response to new developments. The new procedure allowed an amendment to go into force on a given date, unless a specific number of states objected. As a result, numerous amendments have been made to SOLAS in the subsequent years. Major amendments have addressed fire safety, stability, lifesaving equipment, and communications equipment.

Other Conventions

- International Safety Management Code is intended to improve the safety of international shipping and reduce pollution from ships. It mandates a company program for documentation of maintenance, administration and training.
- Convention on Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) established the first international minimum standards for crew training.
- Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL 73/78) was introduced by IMO to address pollution from oil, chemicals, packaged goods, sewage and garbage.
- Convention on International Maritime Satellite Organization (Inmarsat) used space satellites to overcome congestion of traditional radio facilities.
- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea protects and preserves the marine environment in areas outside the limits of national jurisdiction.

Other Sources

- <http://www.imo.org/imo/introd.htm>

maritime safety. Three SOLAS conventions had been adopted before the IMO came into existence. The IMO's first task was to reflect the technical advances in the maritime industry since the SOLAS Convention of 1948. The result was adoption of the SOLAS convention of 1960 with delegates from 55 countries.



The Thirteenth Coast Guard District Public Affairs Office (dpa) created this page on December 27, 1999 and last modified it June 26, 2002. This page may be reproduced locally. If any changes are needed please notify D13 (dpa) at 206.220.7237. More Coast Guard information can be accessed at <http://www.uscg.mil> and a complete listing of these fact sheets can be found at <http://www.uscg.mil/d13>.